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F O C I

Forms Of Contemporary Illinois



Razon para encontrar un camino (The reason to find a path), 1991, oil on canvas, 58" x 66".

Jane Stevens

The Illinois State Museum

Presents

NEREYDA GARCÍA-FERRAZ

FOCI: NEREYDA GARCÍA-FERRAZ

Introduction

The Illinois State Museum presents the artwork of Nereyda García-Ferraz in the third installment of the three-part, solo series titled FOCI (Forms of Contemporary Illinois). FOCI, now in its second season, has been designed as a forum for artwork which is absolutely current. Each solo exhibition will focus on a contemporary Illinois artist with a particular and significant approach to art making. This program is funded in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a State agency.



I am a Cuban artist. I came to the United States in 1971 when I was 15 years old. With my painting I create representations of time, separation and language through which I try to establish a connection with the viewer to communicate the experience of being in exile as well as the necessity of linking different cultures through the vocabulary of painting. Through my work I communicate the light and texture of my origins. I am confronting the many tensions that exist among us, and I support a process which will dissolve the barriers that separate us. My hope is that through my work I will help to bridge the enormous gap that exists between nations, languages and cultures.

*Nereyda
García-Ferraz*

Most of us recognize the truth in Thomas Wolfe’s statement, “You can’t go home again.” We have all tried unsuccessfully to go “home” in some sense. For Cuban-born artist Nereyda García-Ferraz the statement means more than the usual nostalgic wish for a return to the familiar ways of childhood. Hers has been a reluctant exile from a Cuban homeland she left at age 15. Now years later she struggles to preserve her cultural identity in the face of an ever-receding past. Her painting is about this struggle.

García-Ferraz combines symbol, image and text to tell her story. Her visionary paintings speak to us indirectly with their luminous color and vivid symbols and directly by incorporating fragments of Spanish text. The sources for her symbols are personal and unfamiliar to most of us. They are inspired by Santería, an Afro-Caribbean religion which grafts Yaruba traditions with elements of Catholicism. Magical and mysterious they become pictographic metaphors reaching beyond the merely personal to comment on society at large.

Often she represents herself or humankind in spirited animal form—a goat, a dog, a ram. Nereyda remarks, “Humans go around on two legs, but they seem to be looking for another pair!” The emotional tone of her iconography ranges from the haunting houseboat to the tree of life with its new growth emerging from the scars of severed branches; from the rooster, symbol of love and marriage to the flowing water connecting and transporting all.

The immediacy of her style and highly developed symbolic vocabulary recalls “outsider” and folk art strains found in many Latin American and Caribbean cultures and throughout the United States. Visually they are situated somewhere between the brilliantly colored backdrops of Latino street theater with its roots in “Comedia del Arte” and illuminated manuscripts, both Medieval in origin. Like the internalizing impulses of the Chicago Imagists, whose early works García-Ferraz admires, she openly embraces cartoonlike, funky, idiosyncratic and intuitive decoration.

“Con la cabeza puesta al mar” (With the head in the ocean) illustrates in symbolic terms what it means to leave one land for another. Curtains are drawn on setlike dreamscapes. A head overpainted with a personalized phrenology chart sticks out of the water in profile, circled by clouds of goodbyes—te llamaré (I will call you), te recordaré (I will remember you), te escribiré (I will write to you), te soñaré (I will dream of you), regresaré (return). Balancing this scene is a head-on view of an oceanliner, its blackened windows



Jane Stevens

Con la cabeza puesta al mar (With the head in the ocean), 1991, oil on paper, 50" x 77"

numbered. Both scenes have split-sky backdrops (day/night, dusk/dawn, past/present, future/past). The central lower image is a poignant portrait of the individual in which García-Ferraz represents herself as the dog alone, floating on a log raft between two coasts, accompanied only by a shadow and an image of home.

Her paintings remain faithful to an inner vision of her reality. On her own terms, in her own language, she confronts the hegemony of our Eurocentric culture. Her intuitive method and improvisational approach is counter to much contemporary art that seems commodity-driven, hands-off or high-tech. García-Ferraz fills her painting with a belief system that invokes the power of myth and the primacy of painting as a still viable means of communication. In the end, Nereyda García-Ferraz goes "back home again" through her art, reclaiming her heritage, and linking her past to the present with a sense of continuity and identity. Her paintings become witness to the possibility of the earth as a global village connected not only by foreign interest and satellite transmissions but primarily by a common humanity.

Robert Sill
Assistant Curator
Illinois State Museum

FOCI: NEREYDA GARCÍA-FERRAZ

Introducción

El Museo del Estado de Illinois presenta con mucho orgullo la obra artística de Nereyda García-Ferraz en la tercera face de una serie tripartita, de exposiciones individuales titulada FOCI (Imágenes de Illinois Contemporáneo). FOCI, actualmente en su segunda temporada ha sido concebida como un foro para obras artísticas es absoluta y rigurosamente contemporáneas. Cada exposición se enfocará hacia un artista contemporáneo de Illinois que haga arte de manera muy particular y innovativa. Este program está subvencionado en parte por el Illinois Arts Council, una agencia estatal.



Soy una artista cubana. Llegué a los Estados Unidos en 1971 cuando tenía quince años. Con mi pintura creó representaciones de tiempo, de separación y de lenguaje por las cuales intento establecer una conexión con el veedor para comunicar la experiencia de ser exiliada tanto como la necesidad de vincular culturas diferentes por el léxico de la pintura. A través de mi obra expreso la luz y la textura de mis orígenes. Me enfrento con las muchas tensiones que existen entre nosotros, y apoyo un proceso que disolverá las barreras que nos separan. Tengo la esperanza de que mi obra ayude a hacer un puente entre la distancia enorme que existe entre naciones, lenguas y culturas.

*Nereyda
García-Ferraz*

La mayoría de nosotros reconocemos la verdad en la declaración de Thomas Wolfe, “No se puede volver a casa nuevamente.” Todos hemos tratado de alguna manera y sin éxito de “volver a casa.” Para Nereyda García-Ferraz, una artista nacida en Cuba, esta expresión tiene más significado que el común deseo nostálgico de retornar a las costumbres de la infancia. Lo suyo ha sido un exilio forzado de su tierra natal cubana la que abandonó a los quince años. Ahora muchos años después, lucha por preservar su identidad cultural ante un pasado cada vez más lejano. Su pintura expresa de esta lucha.

García-Ferraz combina el símbolo, la imagen y el texto para narrar su historia. Sus pinturas visionarias nos hablan indirectamente con su color luminoso y sus símbolos vivos; y más directamente al incorporar fragmentos de textos en español. Las fuentes de sus símbolos son personales y desconocidas para nosotros. Se inspiran en la Santería, una religión sincrética africano-caribeña que reconcilia tradiciones Yoruba y elementos del Catolicismo. Su obras mágicos y misteriosa se transforma en metáfora pictográfica que se extiende más allá de lo personal para comentar sobre la sociedad en general.

Muchas veces se representa a sí misma o a la humanidad en alguna forma animalesca— una cabra, un perro, un carnero. Nereyda observa, “Los seres humanos andan en dos piernas, pero parecen estar buscando otro par!” El tono emocional de su iconografía va desde una barcaza fantasmal hasta el árbol de la vida con retoños que emergen de las cicatrices de sus ramas cortadas; del gallo, símbolo del amor y el matrimonio, al agua que fluye conectando y transportandolo todo.

La inmediatez de su estilo y el vocabulario simbólico tan desarrollado nos recuerdan las corrientes del arte folklórico y “forastero” encontrado en muchas culturas latinoamericanas, del caribe y estadounidenses. Visualmente se sitúan entre los escenarios colorados brillantemente del teatro latino callejero con sus raíces en “La Comedia del Arte” y manuscritos iluminados, los dos de origen medieval. Como los impulsos internalizantes de a Imágenes de Chicago, cuyas primeras obras García-Ferraz admira, abraza abiertamente una decoración intuitiva, idiosincrática, caricaturesca y “funky.”

“Con la cabeza puesta al mar” (With the Head in the Ocean) muestra en términos simbólicos lo que significa dejar un país por otro. Se corren cortinas sobre un escenario de paisajes oníricos. Una cabeza sobre pintada con un diagrama frenológico personal, surge del agua, de perfil, rodeada por nubes de despedidas—“te llamaré (I will call you), “te recordaré” (I will remember you), “te escribiré” (I will write you), “te soñaré” (I will dream of you), “regresaré” (I will return). Balanceando esta escena, es una vista delantera de un barco transatlántico, sus ventanas numeradas. Las dos escenas tienen un fondo de cielos partidos (noche/día, atardecer/amancer, pasado/presente, futuro/pasado). La imagen central inferior, es un retrato conmovedor del individuo en el cual García-Ferraz se representa a sí misma como un perro solitario flotando en una balsa entre dos costas, acompañado por solo una sombra y una imagen de su hogar.

Sus pinturas se quedan fieles a la vision interna de su propia realidad. En sus propios términos y en su propio lenguaje, ella se enfrenta con la hegemonía de una cultura eurocéntrica. Su método intuitivo y su acercamiento improvisacional esta en desacuerdo con el arte contemporáneo que parece estar dirigido por el consumismo inalcanzabilidad y tecnología avanzada. García-Ferraz llena su pintura con sistema de creencia que invoca el poder del mito y la primacia de pintura como una vía aún viable de comunicación. Al final, Nereyda García-Ferraz sí “vuelve su hogar” por medio de su arte, reclamando su patrimonio, y enlazando su pasado a su actual sentido de continuidad e identidad. Sus pinturas atestiguan a la posibilidad de la tierra como un pueblo global unida no solamente por intereses extranjeros y transmisiones de satélite sino por su más primordial humanidad.

Robert Sill
Asistente del Curador
Museo del Estado de Illinois

La eternidad

(Eternity), 1991,

oil on canvas,

56" x 64"



Selected Biographical Information

Born in 1954 in Havana, Cuba. Came to the United State in 1971 and currently works and resides in Chicago.

Education

1981 B.F.A. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Recent Solo Exhibitions

- 1991 *FOCI: Nereyda García-Ferraz*, Illinois State Museum, Springfield and State of Illinois Art Gallery, Chicago
Recent Works, Etnia Gallery, Mexico City
- 1990 *Recent Paintings*, Deson-Saunders Gallery, Chicago
Paisajes de Ida y Vuelta, Museo Universitario, Mexico City, Mexico
- 1989 *Solo Show*, Arte Club, Sponsored by Regione Siciliana, Opera Universitaria, Sicilia, Italy
- 1987 *Ana Mendieta; Fuego de Tierra*, Video exhibition at The New York Museum, New York

Recent Group Exhibitions

- 1991 *CUBA-USA, The First Generation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
- 1990 *De la estructuracion plastic en serie*. INBA. Centro Cultural Santo Domingo, Mexico City
Spirits in the Material World, Deson-Saunders Gallery, Chicago
Group Show, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology
Soul Survivors, Beacon Street Gallery, Chicago
Group Show, Jan Cicero Gallery, Chicago
Group Show, Chicago Mercantile Exchange, curated by Dennis Adrian
- 1989 *Elements of Style*, Deson-Saunders Gallery, Chicago
- 1988 ¡Adivina! Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City
¡Adivina! Mexican Fine Arts Center • Museum, Chicago
Emergence, Lower Concourse Gallery, Chicago, curated by Shelden Lurie
- 1987 *Urgent Messages*, Chicago Cultural Center, curated by Don Baum and Ken Burkhart
Latina Art Showcase, Mexican Fine Arts Center • Museum, Chicago
Fantastic Color Exhibition, Pan American Festival
Artagogo, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago
Women of Hispanic Background, Beacon St. Gallery, Chicago

Awards and Fellowships

- 1989 National Endowment for the Arts, (painting)
Illinois Arts Council Visual Arts Fellowship
- 1988 Chicago Artists Abroad
Winner, Best Documentary Video at New York National Latino Festival, for *Fuego de Tierra*
- 1986 Illinois Arts Council, Visual Arts Fellowship
National Endowment for the Arts, (painting)

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Checklist of the Exhibition

Así vas tu en mi corazón, así eres tu 1990
(This is how you go in my heart, that is how you are)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

Dedicado a quien sabe esperar 1990
(Dedicated to who knows how to wait)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

Es agradable pero no es el correr 1990
(It is comfortable but there is no hurry)
oil on canvas
56" x 66"

La tarde 1990
(The evening)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

La vigilia 1990
(The vigil)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

Sin oír, sin ver 1990
(Without listening, without seeing)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

Todo o nada 1990
(All or nothing)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

A mí que nunca nada se me olvida 1991
(Me that never forgets anything)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

Con la cabeza puesta al mar 1991
(With the head in the ocean)
oil on paper
50" x 77"

La eternidad 1991
(Eternity)
oil on canvas
56" x 64"

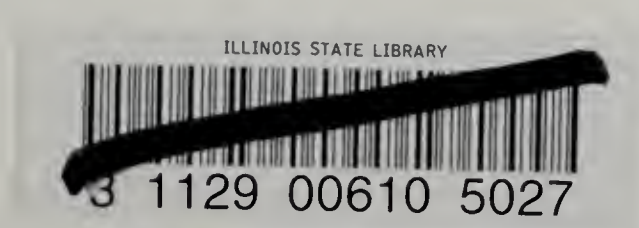
Razon para encontrar un camino 1991
(The reason to find a path)
oil on canvas
58" x 66"

Recordando una canción mientras trabajo 1991
(Recalling a song while I work)
oil on paper
38" x 50"

All works courtesy of Deson/Saunders Gallery, Chicago.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to Nereyda Garcia-Ferraz for her art work and for many enlightening conversations. The collective efforts of my Illinois State Museum colleagues have been invaluable in realizing this show. Thanks are due to Director for Art Kent Smith for his insight and support; Associate Curator Terry Suhre for his continuing encouragement; Preparator Brian Etheredge, Registrar Carole Peterson, and Assistant Preparator Phil Kennedy for their hard work in preparing the exhibition; and Administrative Assistant Amy Knox for assistance with editing and brochure design. Thanks also to State of Illinois Art Gallery (SIAG) Administrator Debora Duez Donato for her cooperation and support and also to the Gallery staff. Special thanks to Jane Stevens (SIAG Registrar) for her photography and video assistance and to Sharon Elaine Russell for her translation and to Ana Cecelia Velasco for conducting the editing of the translation. Thanks also to Ken Saunders, Director, Deson/Saunders Gallery, Chicago.



MUSEUM

FOCI: Nereyda García-Ferraz

Curated by Robert Sill

July 28 – September 8, 1991

Illinois State Museum

Spring and Edwards
Springfield, IL 62706
217/782-7386

Museum Hours:

Monday–Saturday, 8:30 a.m. –5:00 p.m.
Sunday, 12:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.

This program is funded in part by the
Illinois Arts Council, a State agency.

November 12 – January 3, 1991

State of Illinois Art Gallery

State of Illinois Center
100 West Randolph, Suite 2-100
Chicago, Illinois 60601
312/814-5322

Gallery Hours:

Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Non-Profit Org.

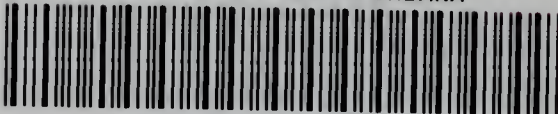
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